

DRAFT MINUTES OF WOTTON-UNDER-EDGE TOWN COUNCIL
ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY
Held on Friday 12th May, at 7pm in the Civic Centre



Present: Cllrs P Smith (Mayor), T Luker (Deputy Mayor), R Claydon, John Cordwell, June Cordwell, N Clement, A Wilkinson, P Barton, L Farmer, C Young, A Proctor

In attendance: Town Clerk Ms S Bailey & council staff Members of the Public 18

- 1) **Welcome, introductions & receive apologies** Apologies for absence received from N Pinnegar, A Kendall.
- 2) **Adoption of previous Minutes of Annual Parish Assembly** of 22nd March 2016 & any Matters Arising from those Minutes. It was proposed by L Farmer and seconded by P Barton to approve the Minutes as presented, all in favour.

3) **Guest speaker Mr A Harris Head Teacher of Katherine Lady Berkeley School (KLB)**

Mr Harris was welcomed and spoke to the meeting about funding cuts in the education sector as well as likely changes due to the expansion of grammar schools and the introduction of Multi-Academy Trusts. He outlined the possible effects of these issues on KLB School over the next few years. Mr Harris explained that although the Government had given reassurances about funding being protected, this was not the case. He outlined the current funding situation at KLB and the challenges presented by recent increases in expenditure and reductions in income. He advised that the financial situation at the school was currently secure due to a number of economies that had been made, but that various challenges had to be met over the next few years if this position was to be maintained.

Mr Harris went on to affirm KLB's commitment to remaining as a comprehensive school and detailed the advantages of this system, including the opportunities for all pupils provided by large comprehensives and the success of local comprehensives in Gloucestershire's list of top ten schools. However, he outlined the various threats presented by plans for the expansion of the grammar school system, including the possibility of comprehensives converting to grammar schools, Multi-Academy Trusts converting one school to a grammar, or free schools setting up as grammar schools. Mr Harris explained some of the disadvantages of Multi-Academy Trusts and informed the meeting that KLB intends to remain as a Single Academy Trust. However, due to the different model in operation for primary schools, this could be reviewed if local primary schools were threatened, in order to ensure a holistic approach that protects the interests of all local children. He concluded by inviting comments and discussion on the topic to himself via email at KLB. The Mayor thanked Mr Harris for his attendance and explanations.

4) **Brief Report from the Mayor:** Cllr Paul Smith.

The Mayor conveyed thanks to the Town Clerk and staff for their hard work during what has been a very busy year. He noted changes in Town Council membership during the year, thanking various committee chairs and members of committees and working groups for their contributions. He outlined the Council's continued financial support for the swimming pool and the youth centre. The Council had built on last year's NALC Foundation Level Award by gaining a Silver/Quality Award and may attempt the Quality Gold Award. The Council completed the new Community

Plan with the input of a working group from the Regeneration Committee, and this is available on the Council's website. The Heritage Centre has gained additional support from the Town Council with an extended lease under negotiation. The integral Visitor Centre is working alongside that of the One Stop Shop. The Mayor expressed his hope that residents and visitors are enjoying the new landscaped area outside the Rope Walk toilets and thanked the Town Clerk for delivering a successful project. Stroud District Council (SDC) is being pressed to carry out improvements to the toilets. The Mayor noted the success of the first Wotton Walking Festival along with the Arts Festival and Garden Trail. A second Walking Festival is planned for next year. The Arts Centre has secured an extended new lease for the Chipping Hall which will allow them to apply for various grants.

5) Reports from Town Council Committee Chairs:

- **Planning:** Cllr Terry Luker reported that the Potters Pond development had finally been completed. A housing association had expressed interest in developing the Fountain Crescent site for affordable housing. He noted the very strong views of the community in relation to the two major developments at Holywell Farm and the land behind the Fire Station and reported that the second of the two applications had been withdrawn to allow further consideration by the applicant. The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) had replaced S106 from 1st April 2017. A higher level of CIL is payable if the town has a Neighbourhood Development Plan but this would cost approximately £50,000 to implement. The Town Council was consulted by SDC on 98 planning applications, slightly fewer than the previous year.
- **Footpaths:** Cllr Roger Claydon reported on changes in Footpath Committee membership during the year and invited interested parties to join. The Committee has been working on a review of the parish's public rights of way and has also started on a survey of the town's footways and pavements. He invited members of the public to submit reports if they have any concerns about footpaths and footways. With financial support from the Town Council, it is planned for the Cotswold Wardens to repair the old mill wall and install a stone seating circle at the Holywell Leaze site, which is overseen by the Committee. The Committee has also been involved in the planning of the Wotton Walking Festival, which has received financial support from both the Town Council and the Chamber of Trade in order to get the initiative underway.
- **Allotments:** Cllr Paul Barton reported on the current situation in respect of the number of allotments on the two sites and plots available. Work has been completed to shore up the paths at New Road and Cllr Barton thanked Mr Howse for keeping the overall cost low and Mr Jones for supplying the wood. The gradient at the main entrance of New Road has been surveyed but work is on hold due to costs and other issues. A new noticeboard has been installed at New Road and the reduced water pressure at the site is currently under investigation.

At Knapp Road, it has been decided to leave the existing bramble patches, in order to encourage wildlife. A new inspection system has been introduced with the aim of improving plot maintenance and Cllr Barton invited tenants to approach him with any issues or suggestions for improvements. He also outlined the benefits of forming committees for both the sites and invited interested parties to contact the Town Council. Cllr Barton apologised for the delay in implementing some projects due to staff sickness.

- **Regeneration Partnership:** Committee chairman Cllr Alistair Kendall was not present at the meeting – the report in the booklet outlines the activity of the Town Regeneration Partnership during the year.
- 6) **Receive brief updates from Council supported organisations.**
- **Wotton Youth Partnership:** No attendee, report as presented in the booklet.
 - **Wotton Library:** No attendee, report as presented in the booklet.
 - **Wotton in Bloom:** Sue Hunt reported on the success of Wotton in Bloom in 2016 which was widely considered to be the best ever year. She provided the meeting with an outline of how the group is organised, funded and achieves its aims. Sue highlighted the benefits of Wotton in Bloom to the town, how it is a great model of community cohesion and what it means to live in Wotton. People are coming to Wotton from other towns and looking to replicate the scheme in their own area. She encouraged people to support the initiative through the Tesco tokens being collected in stores during May and June as part of the Bags of Help Programme.
 - **Wotton Swimming Pool:** No attendee, report as presented in the booklet.
 - **Wotton Community Sports Foundation:** Sarah Watt presented the WCSF report highlighting the key points. The safe access path was successfully completed and opened in November 2016 and the group anticipates an extra 8,000 visits to the site due to use of the path for a range of activities. Thanks were given to the groups and individuals who made donations to support the path, in particular the Barnwood Trust and Wotton Town Council. The new Saturday parkrun event had also increased site usage. The Astro and 3G pitches are now in their fourth season and continue to be well used with Wotton becoming a centre of excellence for hockey. The WCSF estimates that the PARC now achieves around 120,000 visits a year. The group has now planted over 5,000 saplings on the site, built a covered seating area by the skatepark and helped the rugby club to power their flood lighting. Future plans include a BMX dirt track, memory walk, increased seating, a play area as well as a full size artificial pitch and changing rooms. WCSF has worked closely with KLB School to create a hub of sport and activity. The group welcomes anyone who has ideas for the future development of the PARC. The Secret Gardens Trail in May will raise further funding for the PARC and 'Party in the PARC' is being held on June 17th, with a wide programme of events for all.
 - **Synwell Playing Fields Committee:** Mr James Thompson, Chair of the Synwell Playing Fields Committee, presented a report on what the organisation had achieved during 2016/7, their 85th year. A new committee was formed which has attracted a number of new younger members, ensuring that the playing field remains as a well-used community asset for the foreseeable future. The Committee has successfully raised funding from a number of sources which has been used for various new pieces of play equipment. Mr Thompson thanked the organisations which had supported the playing field. He also thanked Wotton Town Council, in particular the Town Clerk, for helping the new Committee to get established and apply for funding. Events held during the year were noted and the Committee is continuing to explore ways of opening up the field to other users. Wotton Rovers continues to use the field and remedial work has taken place to the pitch as well as updating the changing rooms. The pitch and other facilities were rated as Good by the GPFA in September 2016 and are now rated Excellent following a further £17k spent this year. Consideration is being given to providing outdoor fitness equipment and a shelter for the 14-17s age group. The Committee is negotiating a new 20-year lease with the Pavilion Sports and Social Club. The Committee plans to celebrate the 85th year with an event in September along the lines of the old

Synwell Show and Carnival. Cllr Paul Smith wished the Committee well with the lease negotiations and Sarah Watt offered her congratulations on how well the new Committee has managed.

- **Wotton Heritage Centre:** Haidee Jackson highlighted the key points from the report, informing the meeting that the Heritage Centre Management Team had implemented the agreement made with the Town Council in 2015/6 to develop the Centre, including opening in the afternoons and weekends to support the work of the One Stop Shop. Other developments include conservation projects, developing the front of the building as a Visitor Information Centre, new signage, new storage boxes and materials, and improved display cabinets. The year had been very successful with three exhibitions taking place. Electronic storage of data has improved due to training of a dedicated committee member, with plans in place to make this available online and share information with other centres. Work has taken place to recover thousands of photographic negatives from the Gazette archives. A new project is underway with the Wotton Youth Partnership to record on film people in their later years. Good relationships have been built with the One Stop Shop, the Cotswold Group of Tourist Information Managers and the new Tourism Network set up to cover the Cotswold Severn Vale, including meetings attended to raise Wotton's profile on the tourist trail. All this work has resulted in increased footfall at the Centre and raised its profile in the town.
- 7) **County Council:** County Cllr Dr J Cordwell outlined various initiatives and activities from a county perspective over the past year. The Highways Department budget had increased by £4M as well as funding increases for children's, young people's and adult's services. The Council Tax Precept increase was approved at 1.99%, plus 2% adult social care levy. The County Council's share of Band D Council Tax increases by £45.25 to £1,179.26. The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) had withdrawn from the Road Safety Partnership because of reduced funding and consideration is being given to PCCs taking over local Fire and Rescue Services. The PCC had decided not to replace the retiring Chief Constable although a new appointment has now been made. Consultation was undertaken on the introduction of a national funding formula for mainstream schools, resulting in considerable opposition. The proposals would have a significant impact on funding for local schools with smaller primary schools being favoured. Amey's Highways contract ends in April 2019 and the Council will decide in June/July whether to retender or extend the contract. Issues relating to low satisfaction levels with the current contract had been raised. The Children's Activity Fund continues this year at £5K and is now open for bids. The County Council had dealt with a range of issues over the year, including slow issue of death certificates, poor waste recycling rates, the state of the roads, bus services, A&E waiting times, ambulance response times, NHS and care services funding and students' mental health problems. Conversion of street lights to LEDs has largely been completed in Wotton. A new bus no.60 is running from Thornbury to Gloucester and Mike's Travel continues to provide a service despite withdrawal of funding. Public is advised that local issues such as drains and streetlights can be reported via the GCC website.
- 8) **District Council:** District Cllr Ken Tucker was not present at the meeting. Report as presented in the booklet.
- 9) **Questions or comments from the Public on Town Affairs**
Mr M Tucker asked why some of the reports in the booklet had not been presented to the meeting. Cllr P Smith explained that those organisations were not supported

financially by the Town Council and were under no obligation to attend. Mr Tucker drew attention to the Chamber of Trade report and questioned the decision of the Town Council not to support the recent new car par opportunity. The Mayor replied that council has to listen to the views of both sides and take a view. Since the majority of councilors had objected to the application, that became the final town council decision.

Mr M Lovell commented that there had been no election of Councilors for many years and questioned the democratic mandate of the Council. The response was that every four years there is a parish election opportunity and all who wish to stand as a town councilor are encouraged to do so.

Mr D Harrison of the Swan Hotel commented that following the Council's earlier 'in principle' support of the car park development, he had invested a six-figure sum and expressed displeasure at the later decision made by the Council to object to the development. He asked what the Council is now doing about parking in the town. The Mayor replied that SDC would make the final decision on any application and pointed out that the application had now been withdrawn as the developer is working on further information.

Mr J Thompson commented that in his view there was a risk of selling the town for cash incentives, which could result in the character of the town being destroyed in the short term for very little benefit. Mr Thompson thanked Councillors for giving up their time for the benefit of the town.

Mr W Thomas drew the meeting's attention to the customer survey conducted by the Chamber of Trade about the car park development proposal. 93% of the 1,277 people surveyed had shown support for the car park proposal, which indicated that the town wasn't 'split down the middle' as some had suggested. Mr Thomas commented that in his view, businesses were losing money because people couldn't park and the town was in decline as a result. The Mayor thanked Mr Thomas for his views, and indeed all other contributions on this emotive subject. The matter was now in the hands of the Planning Authority –SDC.

The Assembly concluded at this point and Parishioners were invited to share refreshments with Councillors and staff

Signed Date
Chairman & Town Mayor